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Spectres of Hierarchy in the Domestic Archive: Ignacio Agüero's *El otro día*

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Abstract:

The work of Chilean documentary filmmaker Ignacio Agüero demonstrates a constant preoccupation with the home and its environs. In his film *El otro día* [*The Other Day*] (2012), the director's home is presented as the repository of personal memory and, more problematically, of national history. Agüero's camera travels between domestic interior and urban exterior, attempting a reconstruction of community across the physical and social boundaries of Chile's capital. This article contends that Agüero's development of an analogy between the (middle-class) house and the film camera restricts that endeavour. Where much scholarship on domestic documentaries privileges notions of encounter and intersubjective exchange, the article engages with theorisations of the archive and 'counter-archive' to insist on the persistence of spectral images of hierarchy. These spectres mark the limitations of a project of memory undertaken through the logic of private property.

Keywords: Agüero, archive, Chile, domestic space, memory, spectre

One of the first shots of Patricio Guzmán's feted 2010 film *Nostalgia de la luz* [*Nostalgia for the Light*] is of a sunlit, old-fashioned domestic interior. The camera lingers on the shadows cast by leaves on the floor, and presents a side-plate and an old radio in close-up. These objects lead Guzmán into a meditation on the apparent loss of an innocent, provincial Chile, where Santiago seemed isolated from the rest of the world. The Chile Guzmán describes resembles that characterised by José Bengoa as a lost community, a mythical rural past where the nation is imagined as an island surrounded by unnavigable seas (1996: 32-33). By staging the house's connection to national myth-making, *Nostalgia de la luz* highlights issues that appear in other recent Latin American documentary and essay films focusing on the domestic interior: the tension between lived experience and its recording and preservation in an archive, and the possibility of community, whether within the home or beyond it.ⁱ

Albeit with a different emphasis, Carmen Castillo's 2007 documentary *Calle Santa Fe* [*Santa Fe Street*] explores similar concerns. Castillo, a former militant with the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* [Revolutionary Left Movement, MIR] revisits the house in Santiago where she was abducted by the military in 1974 and her partner, Miguel Enríquez, was killed. Castillo's desire to convert the house into a museum and memorial to Enríquez is met with resistance by younger members of the MIR, who question the politics of centring this endeavour around the private space of a home.

Both of these films present domestic space as an archive of both individual and collective experience. This article explores the politics of that gesture in the work of another contemporary documentary maker from Chile, Ignacio Agüero. Agüero's

documentary practice is deeply imbricated with domestic space, to the extent that houses, in his view, already undertake the operations associated with the film camera. Agüero has likened his childhood home to a film school, and writes that it contained ‘muchas ventanas productoras de imágenes’ [‘many image-producing windows’], so that ‘[e]l mundo entero no era más que el espacio off de los encuadres de todas las ventanas’ [‘the whole world was nothing more than the off-screen space beyond the frames of all the windows’] (De los Ríos and Donoso 2015: 17-8). This analogy leads Agüero to posit the domestic interior as an escape from history: ‘[a]sí, desde mi casa, entraba y salía de la Historia, como desde un refugio atemporal lleno de rincones, habitaciones y secretos’ [‘so I entered and exited History from my house, as if from an atemporal refuge full of corners, rooms and secrets’] (19).

Much scholarship on domestic documentary film echoes this optimistic, affirmative tone, analysing the kinds of reflexivity and intersubjectivity that can emerge at home (Renov 1999; Russell 1999). Michael Renov, for instance, argues that the experimental documentary practice he terms domestic ethnography ‘occasions a kind of intersubjective reciprocity in which the representations of self and other are simultaneously if unequally at stake’ (1999: 142). In Renov’s view, this reciprocity with a ‘familial other’ allows an explicit questioning of authorial subjectivity (143). Some recent work on Latin American domestic documentaries adopts a similar tone. For Ana M. López, the affective charge of such works ‘exceeds and reasserts the indexical status of nonfiction footage’, and permits an othering of the self (2014: 26-27). It is notable for my purposes here that López’s analysis springs from a metaphor employed by Guzmán, who likens documentary cinema to a national equivalent for a family photo album (25). In what follows here, I will suggest that this metaphor, and

readings of contemporary domestic documentaries in Latin America that emphasise encounter, risk eliding the form of film with that of over media, and neglecting the ways in which local and national histories of inequality are manifested in the physical form of the home and its contents. Indeed, Chilean documentary cinema has relied on the of the domestic sphere's status as an instrument of normalising control as much as it has contested it, as Pablo Corro has shown (2012: 14-16, 21-23). In short, when analysing the potential of domestic encounters to erode intersubjective hierarchies, it is worth heeding 'the specific historicity of the documentary form', as Jens Andermann has recently argued in relation to Brazil (2016: 156). Andermann reminds his readers that 'performances of selfhood are also radically contingent on the localities and temporal moments in which the documentary encounter takes place' (156).ⁱⁱ

In *El otro día* [*The Other Day*] (2012), which will be the focus of my analysis, Agüero demonstrates a profound awareness of this contingency, and of the limits placed on intersubjectivity by the domestic environment and the cinematic medium. These limits emerge from an investigation of the past, via Agüero's house and his documentary oeuvre. The director's home is thus revealed not to be, in fact, an 'atemporal refuge', but rather an uneasy counter-archive in which personal memory and national history meet. I adopt the term 'counter-archive' to describe Agüero's reflexive incorporation of written and audiovisual material into his film, which has been seen to contest the spatio-temporal divisions associated with official archives (not least those related to the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, which have themselves been the subject of artistic interventions).ⁱⁱⁱ Valeria de los Ríos and Catalina Donoso argue that by adopting a multi-layered approach, including

photographs, voice-over narration and fragments of other audiovisual material, *El otro día* presents a radical challenge to traditional conceptions of the archive (2015: 64). However, where de los Ríos and Donoso argue that this assemblage of media represents an opening towards the other and a nascent idea of community (67), I will suggest that it in fact points to the persistence of spectral figures of authority and exclusion, both in Chilean society and within the space of cinematic production.

As such, I argue that *El otro día* reveals a paradox proper to cinema: its specificity is constituted precisely by its incorporation of other media. As Ágnes Pethő notes, ‘the idea that film has indissoluble ties with other media and arts is one of the oldest concerns of theorizing about the movies’ (2011: 1). Pethő argues that cinema persists, even in the age of digital media, in a carving a space for itself ‘in-between’ other media and arts (2). That space is in part defined by distribution: Agüero’s film retains a *cinematic* status in that it does not freely circulate in digital networks: it is seen mainly in film theatres, or through the informal sharing of DVD copies, often obtained from the filmmaker. The manner in which *El otro día* is itself archived, then, is indicative of a claim to a reserved space for cinema, and to a degree of directorial authority.

One of my principal arguments is, correspondingly, that discussions around film’s relation to archival structures should take more account of cinema’s capacity to juxtapose and combine media, and the locations in which such combinations occur. For Marianne Hirsch, a ‘counter-archive’ is grounded in private experience, and characterised by gaps, disconnection and the arbitrary (2012: 227). Hirsch is writing of the kinds of objects that Agüero films: family photographs, trinkets and other

domestic memorabilia. Yet the filming of the counter-archive, as Agüero undertakes it, assembles these objects in a manner that, through a poetic use of montage and voice-over, at least partially reasserts the director's authority as a collector of other media, and contains a spectral reminder of authoritarian power relations from Chile's past.

Just as the counter-archive here differs from Hirsch's conception, my use of the adjective 'spectral' both draws on and exceeds the sense given it by Jacques Derrida, for whom both the archive and cinema merit this description (Derrida 1995; de Baecque, Jousse, and Derrida 2015). In 'Archive Fever', Derrida examines the relationship between the 'psychic archive' of Freudian psychoanalysis and its exteriorisation via writing (1995: 58-60). Derrida argues that 'the meaning of "archive", its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded' (1995: 9, original emphasis). The concept of archive is thus, in Derrida's view, intimately linked to a dominant subject-position. In this model, the archive occupies 'the intersection of the topological and the nomological, of the place and the law' (10), and its structure 'is *spectral*. It is spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent "in the flesh", neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met' (54, original emphasis). As will become apparent, my understanding of *El otro día*'s spectral apparitions builds on Derrida's emphasis on an unequal relation (a gaze not returned), but insists on the importance of location over allegorical theorisation.

In several respects, the Chilean context nonetheless lends itself to Derrida's approach. The family home is often seen to have a dominant position in the nation's public life; Magda Sepúlveda describes contemporary Chile as a country where '[e]l espacio público es cuestionado en su existencia y se afirma, por el contrario, el poder de la casa' ['the very existence of public space is questioned and the power of the household is, by contrast, affirmed'] (15). The legacy of conservative resistance to Salvador Allende and the subsequent dictatorship demands attention in this respect. Wolfgang Bongers, in his discussion of the archive in Argentine and Chilean culture, points to an image of a mother and child on a leaflet produced in 1970 by 'Acción Mujeres de Chile'. The caption reads: '¿Dónde está el papá...?' ['Where is the father?'] (Bongers 2016: 19), implying that the presidential candidacy of Salvador Allende represented a threat to the stability of Chilean families. The household's 'powers of economy', as Derrida calls them (1995: 12), have long seemed strong in Chile.

Indeed, questions of politics and identity have been addressed through the household in Chilean culture with remarkable consistency. Among many other works, José Donoso's *Casa de campo* [*Country House*] (1978), Roberto Bolaño's *Nocturno de Chile* [*By Night in Chile*] (2000) and Diamela Eltit's *Mano de obra* [*Workforce*] (2004) explore the often traumatic filtering of public concerns through private space. Derrida's thought is a valuable tool for analysing Agüero's film precisely because the constitutive violence the French philosopher locates in the figure of the household (for instance in 'Plato's Pharmacy' [1981]) has specific historical correlates in Chile, especially in the dictatorship's co-option of private space for acts of state violence.^{iv} In contemporary Chilean cinema, meanwhile, domestic space emerges as a key

medium through which identities are performed, challenged, broken apart and reformed.^v

El otro día inscribes itself in this latter trend in that it begins to offer a vision of the archive as a dynamic, discontinuous set of practices, rather than as the expression of an authoritarian desire to order and classify knowledge. Yet if I state that this process only begins to take place in *El otro día*, it is because the middle-class home, as Agüero films it, retains inevitable traces of the *arkheion*. My argument therefore partially contests some critical approaches to *El otro día* that emphasise its openness and community-building potential. First among these is the notion that Agüero's personal archive

reorganiza su propia trama en virtud de [un] encuentro en un espacio que es común. Con esto, se señala una historia compartida y una idea de comunidad.
(de los Ríos and Donoso 2015: 67)

[reorganises its own structure according to [an] encounter in a common space.
In this way, a shared history and an idea of community are proposed.]

My analysis will contend that although *El otro día* presents domestic space as continually interrupted by encounters with the urban outside, his film constructs an irreducible distance between filmmaking subject and urban other, linked to the prominence of the home and its association with the film camera. Irene Depetris Chauvin argues that it is precisely this portrayal of the domestic interior as a *camera obscura*, an image-making machine, that allows Agüero to develop a poetic style that breaks down the usual divisions between private and public spaces (2015: 186). She

terms this style ‘una estética de la habitabilidad’ [‘an aesthetic of habitability’] (194). By examining the form of this aesthetics, I will suggest that Agüero’s film does not, however, extend that ‘habitability’ on equal terms to all.

In the first part of this article, I explore how *El otro día* assembles a multi-layered media archive at home, through its unorthodox treatment of time and privileging of interruption. I then argue that any ‘affective cartographies’ of the city or redefinition of the connections between the private and the public (Depetris Chauvin 2015: 182) are conditioned and interrupted by the domestic space, and that Agüero’s poetic style only partially counteracts this dynamic. In concluding, I contend that the director’s domestic archive reveals a blind spot in some influential critical discourses on political memory in Latin America, around the importance of place and property in the search for a just representation of the past.

Agüero’s explicit linking of his subjectivity as filmmaker to domestic space is not, in short, an entirely enabling move. The constitution of home and film screen as both counter-archive and threshold between self and other reveals unsettling remnants of the *arkheion*, of the connections between middle-class home and abusive institutional authority. Writing of the turbulent literary connections between domestic and national narratives, Homi Bhabha suggests that ‘the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions’, and that as a consequence, ‘[t]he unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world’ (1992: 141). It is this shock that acts as the starting point for *El otro día*.

A media archive at home

The film begins as a series of long, static takes of the interior of the director's house in the wealthy neighbourhood of Providencia in Santiago de Chile. The spectator sees light move slowly over a wardrobe before a cut to a sequence of shots of a garden, which is framed, significantly, by windows (Fig. 1). A sense that the house doubles the operations of the camera is thus immediately established. Subsequent shots include close-ups of books and family photographs, including an image of a book titled *New Challenges for Documentary*. The inclusion of that volume and the camera's tracking movement over the bookshelves foreshadow the fact that *El otro día*'s exploration of familial archives will also be a reflexive exploration of the cinematic archives of Agüero's documentary production.

Figure 1

The film also reflexively explores the viability of first-person subjectivity in documentary film. The director himself rarely appears in the frame, and the voiceover encourages the spectator to identify the camera's gaze with Agüero's. Yet this identification is periodically interrupted: for instance, the contemplative sequence described above is interrupted by the doorbell, and Agüero then films his interaction with a man from the marginal neighbourhood of Huechuraba who wants to sell him some cakes. On this first occasion, Agüero asks the man for his name and where he lives. With the subsequent visitors whom he films, who are largely from the city's margins, he will also ask whether he can visit their house, since they have come to

his. Agüero marks out his movements across Santiago as he visits the houses of others on a large map hung on the wall at his home.

The shots of Agüero's visitors, and the sequences he films when he visits, or attempts to locate, their houses, intersect in a seemingly haphazard way with more contemplative footage of his home and the objects and images it contains. Indeed, the doorbell announcing the film's third visitor stops a voiceover by Agüero about the movement of light over a photograph of his parents on honeymoon (Fig. 2) mid-sentence.

Figure 2

Here, the meeting of cinema, photography and natural light generates a tentative, interrupted narrative. In this instance, film works as an archival technology in a more complex manner than that frequently envisaged by scholars. Mary Ann Doane has famously explored film's apparent ability to archive experience, writing that '[w]hat is archived...would be the experience of a presence. But it is the disjunctiveness of a present relived, of a present haunted by historicity' (2002: 23). Doane's formulation of a haunting presence in film rests on a notion of photographic indexicality that, notwithstanding the difference of duration, is similar to that articulated by Roland Barthes in his writing on still photography *Camera Lucida* (2000: 76-77). Indeed, Doane likens her approach to Siegfried Kracauer's description of the uncanny nature of old photographs (2002: 23).

At this moment in *El otro día*, conversely, what film archives is the operation of other archival technologies: the photograph, and indeed the window whose light falls across the image of Agüero's parents. Apparently indexical media are thus uncannily doubled within an intermedial assemblage (of which the house itself is a principal component). From this point onwards, the unannounced reflexive incorporation of older audiovisual material constitutes the primary form of 'haunting' in *El otro día*. Here, documentary does not mimic the family photograph, as Guzmán would have it, but rather seeks precisely to show, through operations of montage and movement, what remains beyond a single photographic frame. The most prominent and repeated examples of these spectral excerpts from Agüero's documentary archive are brief clips of icebergs filmed from a ship (Fig. 3), which follow allusions by Agüero to his family's naval connections. The icebergs, as blank, faceless objects, recall Derrida's definition of the spectre and his concept of the visor effect: 'we do not see who looks at us' (1994: 6). The spectre, in other words, is always part of an unequal relation, always a spectre of hierarchy. Derrida's notions of spectrality and haunting are tied to a disruption of temporal progression and the intrusion of the past into the present: the spectre 'de-synchronises, it recalls us to anachrony' (6). Agüero's film thus constructs a temporality that recalls what Sven Spieker terms the modern (public) archive's 'precarious oscillation between narrative and contingency' (2008: 7). What is striking about *El otro día* is that this oscillation occurs in the domestic space, one more frequently associated with 'nonarchival collections' (6). Haunting, as an instance of the uncanny or unhomely (from *unheimlich*, the appearance of the strange within the familiar [Freud 2003]) results, then, from the collapse of divisions both between interior and exterior and between past and present. Home, often associated with narrative closure in film (Avery 2014: 25), becomes temporally and spatially open.

Importantly, however, it does so *from the filmmaker's perspective*: as we will see below, the camera and the threshold continue to act as a barrier to others. Where Bongers argues that electronic and digital media 'llevan a un borramiento virtual de la diferencia entre archivo, biblioteca y museo en el concepto de "información"' [lead to a virtual erasure of the difference between archive, library and museum within the concept of 'information'] (2016: 12), here the house persists as a stable, if porous, archival figure, and film retains a degree of specificity within intermedial networks.

Figure 3

These techniques might, therefore, be read as ultimately reinforcing the dominant subject-position of the filmmaker as property owner. Joanna Page has suggested that the collapse of distinctions between private and public spaces in contemporary Chilean film (e.g. in *Play* [Scherson 2005] and *Zoológico* [Zoo] [Marín 2011]) is more easily read as evidence of the success of neoliberal discourses of 'self-authorship' than as a strategy of resistance to political hegemony (2017: 269-71). My reading of *El otro día* will similarly argue that there is nothing innately resistant about the film's opening of the domestic archive, and that consequently Depetris Chauvin's 'aesthetics of habitability' seem somewhat utopian. What marks Agüero's film out from the aforementioned productions, though, is its engagement with history, and its recognition of the persistence of more hierarchical forms of authority beneath the neoliberal reorganisation of urban space.

Indeed, *El otro día*'s icebergs can be read as just such an engagement with history, as well as an evocation of Agüero's father's naval career. For Tomás Moulian, Chile's submission of an iceberg from the Southern Ocean to Expo 1992 in Seville, intended as a gleaming symbol of the country's rebirth in the transition to democracy after Pinochet, in effect undertook a 'whitewashing' of the country's traumatic past (1997: 34-36). It is notable in this respect that one of the sequences showing icebergs immediately follows the revelation that Quiriquina, the island in the photograph of Agüero's parents, later housed Pinochet's political prisoners. Agüero's public documenting of his home thus reveals a conflation of family history with national history, but not in the comfortable sense envisaged by the Chilean Constitution ('La familia es el núcleo fundamental de la sociedad' ['The family is the fundamental core of society'] [Chapter 1, Article 1]). As Michael Chanan argues, the entry of the documentary into the domestic sphere has the ability to transform 'the public image of the family as a social institution' (2007: 230). There is no comforting image of the nation as family here.

Filmmaker, urban explorer, bourgeois subject?

Instead, Agüero's interrupted meditations on material objects often point towards the inhabitants of the urban margins. This occurs, for instance, in a sequence which cuts from the faces of children playing in Huechuraba to a poster image of an indigenous family in Agüero's home, and pans from there to a book entitled *Darwin en Chile* [*Darwin in Chile*]. Here again, both the techniques proper to cinema (cuts and camera movements) and its interaction with other media unsettle the rigid spatial and

temporal divisions associated with a traditional archive. Yet the cut also establishes an analogy between camera and house as mechanisms of representation and ‘mechanisms that define space’, which can therefore be haunted (Wigley 1993: 163). The cut moreover outlines a troubling link between Agüero’s project of documenting Santiago’s margins and older, quasi-colonial scientific missions. Roger Koza’s admiring characterisation of Agüero as explorer of an urban archipelago maintains this implicit link, and positions the director as a figure of authority (Koza 2013). Depetris Chauvin aims to resolve the political problem posed by figuring the city as natural wilderness by highlighting the unexpected connections Agüero makes between himself and others:

[e]l ‘aire marino’ de su familia deviene en una configuración visual de una red afectiva insospechada entre él y los otros. (2015: 190)

[His family’s ‘marine air’ is visually configured as an unexpected affective network between himself and others.]

The appeal to affect rather than physical space neatly sidesteps the fact that while Agüero does trace his movements around Santiago on a map on the wall, shots of this in *El otro día* are infrequent and not altogether easy to decipher.^{vi} Yet Depetris Chauvin is arguably being too generous with Koza’s reading here. The implication of the latter is that the middle-class home is the only stable location of culture in the film. Koza’s affirmation that *El otro día* posits the house as an ‘*axis mundi*’, a point around which all events turn (Koza 2013), remits us to Derrida’s *arkheion*, the house as locus of official history and source of authority.

The picture that Agüero's film paints is not quite that clear. Indeed, the voiceover demonstrates sensitivity to the potential hypocrisy of the director's position. Agüero comments, for instance, on a photograph of his son Raimundo, aged four, dressed as naval captain and Chilean national hero Arturo Prat, and then notes that his father entered the navy aged fourteen, the same age as Jemmy Button, the indigenous youth from Tierra del Fuego taken to England on the HMS Beagle by Robert FitzRoy. This narrative of displacement is accompanied by images of Agüero's garden, with its model ship and life ring. Agüero thus suggests that any image of the middle-class home also contains a trace of other communities.

However, it is still the case in *El otro día* that the threshold of Agüero's house acts as a barrier, and that few of his visitors are admitted into his house, while he enters many of theirs. Agüero implicitly recognises this imbalance when he states in interview that '[m]i lugar en todo esto no es tanto mi casa, sino el lugar del mirón' ['My place in all this is not so much my house as the place of the voyeur'] (Marín 2013). Though Agüero has elsewhere described filmmaking as a kind of chemical fusion between filmmaker and object (Mouesca 2005: 107), *El otro día* certainly appears to lament a loss of contact, and depicts the fragmentation of the urban fabric. For instance, Agüero goes to visit the house of his postman, René, who tells him that the upward growth of the city in apartment blocks has made direct interaction between him and his customers ever rarer. A more formally striking illustration of impossible contact comes in the sequence filmed in Huechuraba mentioned above. While Agüero is filming children playing in the street, they approach the camera and ask what he is doing. He explains, but as one of them gets closer, Agüero admonishes him, saying 'No, no lo toques' ['No, don't touch it.']. There seems to be an irreducible distance

between the filmmaker and the people or objects he records, despite the crossing of boundaries between domestic interior and urban exterior. The film camera, too, is a threshold and a limit to the ability of Agüero's 'counter-archive' to create new forms of community. Like the director's house, the camera is expensive property that marks social inequality between the filmmaker and his subjects. The advent of portable digital technology does not erase this fact and, as noted above in relation to the film's distribution, a shadow of directorial authority remains.

The spectre of hierarchy

From this perspective, *El otro día*'s high degree of reflexivity might be viewed as solipsistic. An attentive spectator might spot, for instance, a poster for Agüero's earlier film *Cien niños esperando un tren* [*One Hundred Children Waiting for a Train*] (1988) on a wall, as well as a flyer for Guzmán's *Nostalgia de la luz* on the top of a wardrobe. These apparently intermedial gestures point back towards the cinema of Agüero and his contemporaries, rather than reaching for an 'outside' to film. These images, coupled with Agüero's use of home movie footage, and of footage of icebergs discarded from his film *Sueños de hielo* [*Dreams of Ice*] (1993), present the house as an archive of the experience of others, but only by first being an archive of film. By suggesting an archive not organised according to a rational, homogeneous division of time, but according to chance and interruption, some of Agüero's strategies nonetheless raise questions around the distribution of agency between filmmaker and filmed environment, between 'culture' and 'nature'. As has been noted by critics (e.g.

by de los Ríos and Donoso 2015: 142), in José Luis Torres Leiva's documentary about Agüero, *¿Qué historia es ésta y cuál es su final?* [*Which Story is This and How Does It End?*] (2013), the director likens the plotting of *El otro día* to the twisted branches of a tree in his garden. Here we begin to see how the characterisation of Agüero as venturing out from a domestic interior into an urban wilderness risks overlooking the intertwining of filmmaking subject and 'natural' objects already occurring at home.

Yet the establishment of relations between those two poles does not necessarily lead to the dissolution of hierarchies. Bengoa has argued that authoritarianism in twentieth-century Chile stemmed in part from a desire to recreate rural households within the city (1996: 36-7). So it is perhaps unsurprising that the intertwining that Agüero's editing achieves is accompanied by spectral images of violence. The most sombre of these follows a comment by the director on the development of political tensions around the dinner table when he was a child. 'La violencia se veía venir' ['you could see the violence coming'], states Agüero over a shot of his twilight garden and its furniture, before a sharp cut to a close-up of bones belonging to victims of state violence under Pinochet, taken from Agüero's first feature, *No olvidar* [*Do Not Forget*] (1982) (Fig. 4).

Figure 4

This grainy, black-and-white image might well be described as spectral in Derrida's terms, as a kind of present absence tied not just to the archive but also to 'familial

domesticity’, ‘places, a habitation, and always a haunted house’ (1995: 54-55). Yet the stark materiality of the bones also marks a world beyond theory. Here, film’s claim to indexicality reminds us that for all its elaboration of the violence underlying the domestic sphere, Derrida’s theoretical model cannot fully account for specific national circumstances, such as the use of private dwellings as torture centres under Pinochet’s rule.^{vii} As María del Pilar Blanco argues with reference to spectres in the literature of the Americas, Derridean readings risk losing specificity ‘in favor of larger allegorical diagnoses’ (2012: 8).

Indeed, even in the case of the most reflexive spectral apparition in *El otro día*, location is of crucial importance. This is the momentary apparition of the director Raúl Ruiz, in old footage documenting the shooting of one of his films in Agüero’s house. Ruiz’s voice is heard shouting ‘¡Acción!’ [‘Action!’], from an uncertain off-screen space, just before the cut to this footage takes place. Ruiz’s blurred, fleeting figure, turned away from the camera (Fig. 5), recalls Derrida’s description of the archive’s spectres as traces of figures ‘whose eyes can never be met’ (1995: 54).

Figure 5

What is notable about this moment is that the spectral presence that emerges is one that reminds the viewer of the hierarchical nature of all filmmaking: someone is always calling the shots. Agüero’s encounter with the children in Huechuraba demonstrates a keen awareness of this. So while *El otro día* there is a notable erosion of boundaries between individual and collective memories, it is important to note that the director’s position of authority is largely maintained. This is not to deny the

political value of Agüero's interviews with those living on the margins of the city: as de los Ríos and Donoso argue, the moment of encounter thus becomes central to the director's politics, insofar as these can be discerned (2015: 140). Agüero's insistent questions on daily routine suggest that the life of the nation should be viewed not just through the lens of a bourgeois subject, but also from the perspective of the marginalised. Nonetheless, the positing of real estate property as the condition for interaction with the other results, as we have seen, in the resurgence of spectres of hierarchy, and crystallises the uneven power relations between filmmaker and filmed subjects.

The threshold over which Agüero encounters others thus also marks the liminal position Agüero's filmed house occupies between counter-archive and Derrida's *arkheion*. De los Ríos and Donoso (2015: 150) describe Agüero's work as an 'archivo inacabado, a la vez subjetivo y colectivo, abierto al futuro y al devenir' ['an unfinished archive, at once subjective and collective, open to the future and to becoming']. Such critical accounts implicitly argue for the resistant or revolutionary qualities of Agüero's apparently haphazard audiovisual collection of fragments. Indeed, one might think that the lack of a clear organising principle clearly differentiates Agüero's film from the archive Derrida envisages. The latter both rests on the *arkheion* as locus of worldly authority and contains a drive towards destruction (Derrida 1995: 14). In Chile, this impulse found concrete form in 'the destruction of important archives detailing the whereabouts of the disappeared' which hindered efforts towards justice during the transition to democracy (Lazzara 2006: 19).

Conversely, Agüero's filmmaking is characterised by a concern for the preservation of individual histories, however fragmentary. Yet as *El otro día*'s spectral images show, the authoritarian associations of the middle-class Chilean home cannot be entirely undone by this opening to the outside. Derrida makes the point that there is 'no archive without outside', and asks whether the exterior is itself a kind of archive (1995: 14-15). It could certainly be argued that from the point of view of Agüero's interview subjects, his audiovisual archive *is* the outside coming in, 'reading' their houses for clues about their lives. Agüero's filmmaking, like Derrida's thought, is alive to (and sceptical of) the infraction of private space by audiovisual media, and attentive to the hierarchies implicit in the giving and receiving of hospitality (Derrida and Stiegler 2002: 31-33; Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000). Indeed, the presence of Agüero's camera in a private home in an earlier film, *Cien niños esperando un tren* (1988), triggers a memory of a visit from an agent of Pinochet's intelligence services.

The point of this observation is that *El otro día*'s portrayal of the home as porous (and Agüero makes this image concrete, showing rainwater dripping in) is not in itself a guarantee of ethical practice or the expansion of community. While the term *arkheion* may be unsatisfactory to describe the awkward political position of Agüero's filmic house, this does not mean that its occupant is divested of authority. In unsettling the boundaries of the archive and the home, Agüero's film reveals both as forms that can be used for exclusion and domination as well as narration. *El otro día*'s formal experimentation means that it does this far more explicitly than Castillo's *Calle Santa Fe*, or indeed a number of recent Argentine documentaries that depict the compilation of domestic archives as part of a search for information about the victims of political violence.^{viii} In *El otro día*, as in Antoinette Burton's study of women writers in

colonial India, the merging of home and archive reveals ‘the ultimate fragmentation and ghostliness of all archives: the final unknowability of home and history in their totalities’ (Burton 2003: 144). In concluding, I will suggest that the convergence of home and cinematic archive might encourage a fresh perspective on the politics of memory in contemporary Chile.

The fragmentary property of memory

In articulating that perspective, I turn here to ideas of the fragment and the ruin, in part because of the similarities between *El otro día* and an earlier work by Agüero, *Aquí se construye (o Ya no existe el lugar donde nací)* [*Construction Here (or The Place I was Born No Longer Exists)*] (2000). The earlier documentary addresses the demolition of detached, middle-class houses in the neighbourhood of Ñuñoa to make way for large tower blocks. *Aquí se construye* contains several sequences that show, in slow motion and set to melancholic music (Arvo Pärt’s ‘Fratres’), the demolition of these houses. These sequences might be read as a lament for the loss of suburban life, or of individualized bourgeois subjectivity (these are mostly detached houses). This reading is supported by the statements of Guillermo Mann, Agüero’s principal interview subject in *Aquí se construye*, who likens the impending loss of his house to the death of a family member.

There are, admittedly, significant differences between *Aquí se construye* and *El otro día*. In the latter film, it is not just a question of physical fragments of domestic life,

but also of an arrangement of audiovisual fragments. Moreover, Agüero's house differs from Mann's in that it is not physically detached from the surrounding urban fabric: it is one of the *casas de fachada continua* (large terraced houses with internal courtyards) that characterise some of Santiago's older domestic architecture, and as such is in closer contact with the life of the street. In both cases, nonetheless, the suburban or quasi-suburban house is presented as the place of accumulation of fragments of experiences and memories.

Many scholars have noted that the fragment or ruin has become something of a trope in recent work in Latin American cultural studies, particularly in discussions relating to memory.^{ix} In Chile, Nelly Richard has pointed to the debt such formulations owe to the work of Walter Benjamin, and suggests that much recent Chilean art responds to his privileging of the residual and the discarded in its efforts to build discourses of memory (2004: 14). In James Cisneros' account, the 'figure of memory' in Chilean cinema, an allegorical construction mediating between distinct temporalities and spaces, emerges from this tradition (2006: 60).

In Agüero's films, this figure of memory runs up against the house as a figure for cinema itself. *El otro día*'s insistence on the home as the medium through which the city is viewed implies that the ability to assemble fragments of experience is closely related to a position of privilege (as occupant of the house, or indeed as filmmaker). It is useful to recall here Michael Lazzara's qualification of the Benjaminian model of memory drawn on by many Latin American cultural critics:

[t]his archaeological metaphor, a way of dealing with ruins, alludes to re-membering as a process of piecing together the fragments and shards of experience in ways that permit innovative and unforeseen narrative constellations...But how these ruins are assembled depends entirely upon the lenses through which they are projected. (2006: 32)

In other words, to piece the shards together you need a house in which to gather them. Agüero's choice of the lens of property for his exploration of identity and memory cannot, therefore, be completely just or equitable. Indeed, the positing of a link between domestic space and identity may be productive for the home-owning filmmaker, but is less obvious for his interview subjects, several of whom struggle to pay the rent or are staying temporarily at the houses of friends. This is not necessarily a foundation for criticism: as Bongers notes, 'todo discurso sobre la memoria – textual o audiovisual – es injusto' ['all discourses on memory – whether textual or audiovisual – are unjust'] (2016: 15). Agüero is certainly aware of the limitations of his own approach: at the end of *El otro día*, he contradicts his own assertion that he will not leave Santiago by visiting a house in the port of Valparaíso, and allowing his last interview subject, a young woman named Estibaliz, a minor role in the production of the film (responsibility for the final credits). This is, nonetheless, an exception which highlights the high degree of authority Agüero retains elsewhere in the production. After all, even its 'aesthetics of interruption' (de los Ríos 2017: 118) are ultimately a result of post-production editing.

The political difficulties of Agüero's position are echoed in other Chilean documentaries dealing with the country's traumatic past via the domestic sphere, such as Castillo's *Calle Santa Fe* and *El edificio de los chilenos* [*The Chilean Building*]

(Aguiló 2010). What distinguishes *El otro día* is the appearance of spectral images that do not respond to an obvious narrative logic (the icebergs, Ruiz, the bones). It is this self-consciously filmic evocation of the unhomely, rather than the images of openings and thresholds, that provides *El otro día*'s strongest claim to an ethical approach, to a movement beyond the logic of property.^x These spectres suggest that the transition to democracy in Chile has not erased or fully dealt with the injustices of the past. Indeed, the emergence of these images in the home implies that the privileging of private property, consumption and subjective experience in much of the politics of the transition (analysed by, among others, Norbert Lechner [2006]) maintains the patriarchal 'law of the *oikos*' (Derrida 1995: 54) imposed by the dictatorship. In this vein, Alessandro Fornazzari argues for the recognition of neoliberalism's 'founding moment of authoritarian violence', and suggests that the transition's subjugation of cultural forms to the logic of the market renders the allegorical memory projects of many contemporary Chilean documentaries misjudged (2014: 7-8, 72-78).

El otro día does not ask to be read as coherent, allegorical discourse, and thereby sidesteps Fornazzari's critique. We might instead view Agüero's spectral images as expressions of specific, located anxieties: about the possibility of constructing a just archive of Chile's past, and about the ability of documentary cinema, envisaged as a kind of collective housing project, to bridge the gaps in the country's urban society through an appeal to ideas of affect or intersubjectivity. Page argues that many contemporary Chilean films, in their focus on intimate spaces, construct 'affective communities while, at the same time, often remaining complicit with neoliberalism's discourses of self-authorship and individualism' (2017: 282). The intrusion of

spectres of hierarchy into Agüero's domestic counter-archive upsets that fragile balance, suggesting that filmmaking which engages fully with its domestic location must face up to the less comfortable corners of home.

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ⁱ One might think here of the films of Eduardo Coutinho in Brazil, the work of Sandra Gómez in Cuba, and in Argentina, a film like *Habitación disponible* (Poncet, Burd and Gachassin 2004).

ⁱⁱ Both López and Andermann refer to João Moreira Salles' *Santiago* (2007), a film that bears comparison to Agüero's *El otro día* for its insistence on the archival and hierarchical qualities of the domestic sphere.

ⁱⁱⁱ Voluspa Jarpa's 2000 exhibition 'La No-Historia' displayed declassified CIA archives relating to the Chilean coup of 1973, with their redactions, in Santiago's Museo de Solidaridad Salvador Allende. Fernando A. Blanco proposes that that building itself 'constituye un archivo por derecho propio. Un palimpsesto archivatorio' ['constitutes an archive in its own right. An archival palimpsest'] (2013: 228), thanks to its long association with left-wing intellectual activity.

^{iv} On this point, see writings of Germán Marín (2014) and Carlos Cerda (1996). One might also think of how neoliberal economic policy encourages the subsumption of the public into the private: see Alessandro Fornazzari's analysis of *Casa de campo* in his *Speculative Fictions* (2013).

^v See, for instance, the films of Sebastián Lelio.

^{vi} De los Ríos makes a similar observation, noting that Agüero's map is 'desbordado, excedido por el azar y la interrupción' ['overwhelmed, exceeded by chance and interruption'] (2017: 119).

^{vii} See Bolaño's *Nocturno de Chile* (2000), which contains a character based on the writer Mariana Callejas, who allegedly held literary soirées at her home while torture occurred in the basement (Lazzara 2016).

^{viii} See, for instance, *Papá Iván* (Roqué 2004) and *M* (Prividera 2007).

^{ix} Of these, Idelber Avelar's *The Untimely Present* (1999) is probably the most paradigmatic. See also Franco 2002: 190.

^x Dwayne Avery argues at length for the ethical possibilities of the unhomely in film (2014).